

III. CLAIM AMENDMENTS

1. (Original) A feeder/separator apparatus for separating and moving sheets from a stack of sheets comprising:

an input area for positioning the stack of sheets;

a first and second series of rollers for jointly feeding a sheet on the bottom of the stack into an area of the apparatus including a third and fourth series of rollers and a first series of belts;

a pre-separation brake adapted to act in a pivoting pattern on the first series of belts only, to thereby cause a first stage separation of the bottom sheet;

a separation brake adapted to act in a linear pattern on the fourth series of rollers only, to thereby cause a second stage separation of the bottom sheet, the pre-separation and separation brakes permitting the bottom sheets to be separated from the stack; and

a fifth series of rollers and a second series of belts both being adapted to feed the bottom sheets away from the feeder/separator apparatus in a sheet feed path.

2. (Original) A feeder/separator apparatus in accordance with claim 1 wherein said sheets are mailpieces.

3. (Original) A feeder/separator apparatus in accordance with claim 1 wherein said sheets are envelopes.

4. (Original) A feeder/separator apparatus in accordance with claim 3 wherein said apparatus automatically adjusts to envelope thickness.

5. (Original) A feeder/separator apparatus in accordance with claim 3 wherein said envelopes are of mixed thickness and sizes.

6. (Original) A feeder/separator apparatus in accordance with claim 3 wherein said envelopes are being fed to a postage meter.

7. (Currently Amended) A feeder/separator apparatus for separating and moving sheets from a stack of sheets comprising:

an input area for positioning the stack of sheets;

a first and second series of rollers for jointly feeding a sheet on the bottom of the stack into an area of the apparatus including a third and fourth series of rollers and a first series of belts;

a pre-separation brake adapted to act in a pivoting pattern on the first series of belts only, to thereby cause a first stage separation of the bottom sheet;

a separation brake adapted to act in a linear pattern on the fourth series of rollers only, to thereby cause a second stage separation of the bottom sheet, the pre-separation and separation brakes permitting the bottom sheets to be separated from the stack; and

a fifth series of rollers and a second series of belts both being adapted to feed the bottom sheets away from the feeder/separator apparatus in a sheet feed path,

~~in accordance with claim 1 wherein said feeder/separator apparatus is in a single modular unit~~ a module for a modular mailing machine.

8. (Original) A feeder/separator apparatus in accordance with claim 6 wherein said apparatus includes a moistener positioned within said apparatus for moistening a glue area on a flap of said envelopes.

9. (Original) A feeder/separator apparatus for separating and moving sheets from a stack of envelopes, the apparatus being adapted to adjust to envelope thickness comprising:

an input area for positioning the stack of envelopes;

a first and second series of rollers for jointly feeding an envelope on the bottom of the stack into an area of the apparatus including a third and fourth series of rollers and a first series of belts;

a pre-separation brake adapted to act in a pivoting pattern on the first series of belts only to cause a first stage separation of the bottom envelope;

a separation brake adapted to act in a linear pattern only on the fourth series of rollers to cause a second stage separation of the bottom envelope, the pre-separation and separation brakes permitting the bottom envelopes to be separated from the stack; and

a fifth series of rollers and a second series of belts both being adapted to feed the bottom envelopes away from the feeder/separator apparatus in an envelope feed path.

10. (Original) A feeder/separator apparatus in accordance with claim 9 further comprising a plurality of sensors adapted to control the starting and stopping of movement of various sets of said rollers and said belts in direct relation to the arrival or non-arrival of a leading edge of an envelope.

11. (Original) A feeder/separator apparatus in accordance with claim 9 further comprising a pre-separation sensor adapted to sense the leading edge of an envelope at a starting position in said apparatus.

12. (Original) A feeder/separator apparatus in accordance with claim 9 further comprising a sensor adapted to determine when there are envelopes in the stack of envelopes to be fed.

13. (Currently Amended) A feeder/separator apparatus in accordance with claim 9 further comprising a sensor adapted to sense long envelopes ~~and override the short letter control parameters that the different series of rollers/belts are turned on for.~~

14. (Original) A feeder/separator apparatus in accordance with claim 9 further comprising a sensor adapted to sense that a leading edge of an envelope being separated traveled through said pre-separation and separation brakes within a predetermined time without a jam and that said envelope being separated is about to be picked up by the fifth series of rollers.

15. (Currently Amended) A feeder/separator apparatus in accordance with claim 9 further comprising an output sensor adapted to sense that the leading edge of the envelope being separated has passed through said apparatus ~~and that nothing in said apparatus will stop said envelope past this sensor.~~